

Southern Lake Michigan

Chinook fishing in recent years has been very good, with many fish in 2005 reported between 12 and 18 pounds. The forage base in Lake Michigan is on a slight decline and may have had an impact on the chinook growth rates, so Wisconsin will reduce chinook stocking by 21 percent, or about 300,000 fish, beginning in 2006 as its share of a lakewide stocking reduction agreed to by states surrounding Lake Michigan. In spring 2005, coho were abundant but relatively small. As summer wore on, however, 8- or 9-pound fish became more common. Coho fishing is expected to be as good or better in 2006. Wisconsin's Lake Michigan coho fishery begins in the south (Kenosha and Racine) in April and May and gradually moves north as water temperatures rise, typically reaching Milwaukee in May and Port Washington and Sheboygan by June. Steelhead catches in recent years have been average at best. Because of the excellent chinook fishing close to shore, anglers haven't been as inclined to search for steelhead out in deeper water.

Nearshore fishing

Shore anglers enjoyed some good fishing in July and August working harbors and river mouths for Skamania steelhead. These fish are staging in anticipation of their early fall spawning run. The Chambers Creek and Ganaraska strains should also provide some action for anglers in late winter and early spring.

In recent years two additional rainbow trout strains have been stocked on an experimental basis to augment the near-shore fishery. The Arlee strain has been stocked since 2001 along with the Kamloops strain since 2003. Brown trout fishing was good in spring and fall 2005. Browns provide a consistent nearshore fishery during the cold months, especially at warm-water discharges and near river mouths. We see dependable returns on domestic brown trout, while the fast-growing, hard-fighting Seeforellen strain continues to add excitement to the brown trout fishery.

Although the yellow perch population in Lake Michigan continues to be depressed, fishing from the piers and shore was very good at times in spring and summer 2005. The 1998 year-class still supports a large percentage of the harvest, but the 2001 and 2002 year-classes are contributing substantially to the catches as well. Perch fishing remains closed from May 1 through June 15 to protect mature females before spawning. Many of our harbors have seen habitat improvements over the last decade, which has translated into increasing naturally reproducing populations of smallmouth bass and northern pike, two species native to Lake Michigan. Walleye will be stocked in the Milwaukee River through 2009 as part of the Milwaukee River Estuary Walleye Management Plan. The walleye have shown good survival and high growth rates.

Tributary fishing

Spring and fall steelhead runs have not been strong in recent years. Anglers can generally look for Skamania as water temperatures start to cool in mid-September. Chambers Creek usually follow in late fall and can be found through March and early April. Ganaraska enter the streams as early as late November and December and again from late March through April.

As always, the tributary fishery depends on water temperature and flow conditions, which triggers the upstream migration of salmonids. If flow conditions improve in 2006, we expect a good tributary fishery.

For up-to-date fishing information, call the Southern Lake Michigan Fishing Hotline at (414) 382-7920. To read information about our Lake Michigan program, visit <http://www.fishingwisconsin.org> then look under "Fisheries Program" to find "Lake Michigan." – *Pradeep Hirethota and Cheryl Peterson, Southern Lake Michigan fisheries, Milwaukee*

Waukesha County

Pine Lake

We conducted a comprehensive fish survey on Pine Lake in spring 2005 to estimate the populations of game fish and principal panfish species and to assess their condition and growth rate. Although the data is still being processed, preliminary results reveal a good walleye density of about 3.4 adults per acre. Most Waukesha County lakes have adult walleye densities of 2 per acre or less. Pine Lake has a naturally reproducing walleye population that is supplemented by DNR stocking in odd-numbered years.

An ongoing year-long creel survey on Pine Lake will help determine angler success in catching and harvesting walleyes, bass, northern pike and panfish. To aid this effort, thousands of game fish and bluegills, which were selected as a representative panfish, were tagged with floy-tags. These are thin, barrel-shaped, yellow plastic tags, about 2 ½ inches long, that are anchored in the back of the fish just below the dorsal or back fin. Anglers who harvest a fish with a tag are asked to return the tag to DNR, along with information on the length and weight of the fish when it was harvested. In exchange, DNR sends a letter to the angler telling the length, weight, sex, age and when the fish was tagged. Tag returns help to further define the number of fish that are being removed from a lake. So far, hundreds of tags have been returned to the DNR from Pine Lake, most of them from walleyes. The full report on the spring 2005 Pine Lake fish study should be available on DNR's Web site in summer 2006. The creel survey report should be available in winter 2006/2007.

Oconomowoc River

In fall 2004, the Oconomowoc River between Concord Road in the City of Oconomowoc, and North Shore Drive in the Town of Ixonia (Jefferson Co.), was chemically treated to eliminate the carp-dominated population existing in that 7-mile stretch of river. Since then, thousands of native game fish, panfish and forage fish were stocked to establish a quality fishery. Walleyes, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, bluegills, rockbass, perch, and many non-game fish such as suckers, minnows, darters and shiners were stocked. Some came from state hatcheries, some were transferred from upstream lakes and other parts of the Oconomowoc River, and some were fish salvaged from the river before the treatment and held in nearby Lac La Belle. The result, so far, is a highly diverse fish population no longer dominated by carp. There are already "keeper-sized" bass, northerns and panfish in the river. Once lacking aquatic vegetation in many areas due to carp activity which roots up aquatic plants, DNR biologists are seeing the return of plant beds needed to hold sediment in place and provide habitat and food for minnows and young fish. Although some small carp have already returned to the river from upstream lakes, an electrical fish barrier keeps larger carp from migrating into the Oconomowoc River from the Rock River. We hope the healthy fish community developing in the rehabilitated Oconomowoc River will control carp by preying on these smaller carp and competing with them for food. Additional stocking of game fish and panfish is planned in the coming years.

Muskellunge - Waukesha County has several lakes where musky hunters can pursue their quarry. DNR stocks Okauchee and Pewaukee, but muskies like to travel, and you will now find fishable musky populations in Oconomowoc, Fowler, Lac La Belle, North and even Pine lakes. Muskies originally stocked in Pewaukee Lake are often seen in the Fox River in downtown Waukesha, especially during their April migration period. In fall 2005, Muskies, Inc. and Muskellunge Club of Wisconsin teamed up and purchased 450 Leech Lake (Minnesota) strain muskies and stocked them into Okauchee Lake. These muskies were marked with a fin clip so they can be differentiated from those stocked from the state hatcheries. DNR will evaluate the performance of these fish with future surveys.

Walleye - Each year DNR stocks between 200,000 and 300,000 walleye fingerlings in 17 lakes in alternate years, with about half stocked in even-numbered years and half in odd-numbered years. Recent surveys have shown excellent survival of stocked walleyes with development of good size and age structure in the population. Some of the more popular Waukesha County walleye lakes include Lac La Belle, Oconomowoc, Pine, Nagawicka and Little Muskego. Early walleye anglers tend to set up near the inlet from Fowler Lake and

over the shoal that separates the east and west basins. Oconomowoc Lake's clear water brings most walleye anglers out for the night bite. Nagawicka Lake anglers target the north end and the area known as "the Kettle" especially during ice fishing and early in the open water season.

Bass - Many Waukesha County lakes have both largemouth and smallmouth bass, although in each lake, one species tends to predominate. If you want to fish mainly for smallmouth, you would probably go to Oconomowoc Lake. If largemouth is your favorite, you might try Golden Lake. Largemouth and smallmouth bass are not currently stocked, and bass are managed by protecting and enhancing habitat for spawning and feeding. Recent surveys have found bass populations to be good. Our warm, southern Wisconsin waters provide excellent growth. Smallmouth up to 5 pounds and largemouth up to 7 pounds have been caught in fisheries surveys and also by anglers who find themselves in the right place at the right time. Other good lakes to seek smallmouth are Nagawicka, Okauchee and Pine. Good bets for largemouth action are Keesus, Denoon and Big Muskego.- *Susan Beyler, senior fisheries biologist, Waukesha*

Milwaukee River Drainage and the Metro Area

The Milwaukee River Basin makes up less than 1 percent of Wisconsin's drainage area but is home to 1 of every 6 residents. This simple statistic speaks volumes about the many challenges facing fisheries personnel working in Wisconsin's most developed river basin, estuary and Lake Michigan shoreline. As a result of past disturbances to the basin's land and surface water resources---some extending back over a century--- recent fisheries and watershed management efforts have emphasized habitat restoration, enhancement and protection. These projects combined with other private and public habitat and water quality improvement projects have helped transform the Milwaukee River, many of its tributaries, and the Milwaukee River Estuary into popular fishing destinations.

Since 1987, 10 dams have been removed from the Milwaukee River and its tributaries. For many years, these dams created shallow, silt-laden ponds that warmed stream waters, covered fish spawning habitat and blocked fish migration routes to spawning and wintering habitat. In addition, more than 2 miles of concrete-lined stream channel have been removed from the Lincoln Creek tributary in Milwaukee County. On Pigeon Creek, another valuable Milwaukee River tributary in Theinville, 300 feet of stream is proposed to be taken out of an underground tunnel and opened-up to sunlight, fish and fishing. There is also a possibility that a dam on Pigeon Creek may be removed. This would allow fish spawning access from the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan located 21-miles downstream.

In cooperation with the City of Mequon, we have restored 60 acres of wetland on a former muck farm and 2,000 feet of stream channel along Trinity Creek, a tributary of the Milwaukee River in Ozaukee County. The new stream channel, wetlands and ponds were designed with northern pike spawning habitat in mind. In rural portions of the basin our management actions, combined with improved agricultural land use practices, have changed water quality and stream habitat for the better. It seems there are a few streams where water quality and habitat conditions may have improved enough to increase the length of coldwater trout streams in the basin from the present 25 miles to as much as 50 miles! Temperature monitoring continues on some of these streams and we are making plans to stock trout and gauge their short and long-term survival.

Located in the heart of downtown Milwaukee, fishing opportunities for coldwater and coolwater gamefish have greatly improved in the Milwaukee River Estuary. Exceptional brown trout fishing can be found starting in fall and lasting all winter along the Menomonee River portion of the Estuary. There, anglers have a good chance of landing a huge northern pike, along with walleye and smallmouth bass. A warmwater discharge and large gizzard shad forage base is the major attraction for these game fish. Good parking and shoreline fishing access is available along the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District offices on Seeboth Street. Don't forget a long handled landing net!

With the removal of the North Avenue Dam on the Milwaukee River in 1997, anglers have good access to spring and fall runs of rainbow and brown trout and fall runs of coho and chinook salmon. Under all but

drought conditions, these fish can make their way 21 miles upstream to the Thiensville Dam in Ozaukee County; where good public access exists for anglers who want to wade or fish from shore. Under higher flow conditions, trout and salmon have been taken as far upstream as the Village of Grafton's Lime Kiln Dam and Park in Ozaukee County.

Smallmouth bass fishing in the Milwaukee River should rebound after last year's severe drought and low stream flows. While smallmouth numbers are high; they continue to run rather small. Anglers should expect to encounter an occasional walleye from the lower Milwaukee River. Almost all Milwaukee River walleyes are stocked fish. Since we are hoping to establish walleye natural reproduction, anglers are encouraged to practice catch and release on these stocked walleyes. First stocked in 1995, these walleyes continue to grow at above average rates. In 2006, we'll partner with the Environmental Protection Agency, Walleyes for Tomorrow and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in conducting a fish habitat restoration project along the Milwaukee River immediately downstream of the former North Avenue Dam. This project will provide rubble spawning habitat for walleyes. - *William Wawryzn, senior fisheries biologist, Milwaukee*

Sheboygan County

Anglers should find good stream and lake fishing opportunities in 2006. Hopefully, normal rainfall will return to southeastern Wisconsin counties as several lakes and the Sheboygan River had very low water levels in 2005. The Onion River and its tributaries should be the highlight of trout fishing opportunities in the entire southeastern region. Special regulations put in place in 2004 on all Onion River watershed streams upstream of County E are really paying off. Some anglers commented that they caught more trout on a typical day in the special regulation sections of the Onion River than they normally catch on some of the best southwestern Wisconsin streams. Many areas upstream of County Highway E are open enough now to allow fly fishing. DNR and Lakeshore Chapter – Trout Unlimited combined efforts over the past five years to greatly improve the habitat and fishability of the stream. The trout population is entirely wild brown trout since habitat restoration has greatly increased natural reproduction.

Smallmouth bass fishing on the Sheboygan and Mullet rivers should be very good as well. The best areas to fish for smallmouth bass on the Sheboygan River are downstream of State Highway 23. The Mullet River upstream from Sheboygan Falls is also very good.

Fish survey work at Crystal Lake indicates that the largemouth bass population is holding up well and providing very good fishing opportunities. The panfish population appeared to be somewhat depressed from the past but, should return in coming years when water levels return to normal.

Panfish action at the "South Ditch" area of Sheboygan Marsh has been fantastic at times. DNR crews transferred almost 30,000 panfish from Eagle and Vern Wolf lakes to the Marsh in recent years and those fish provided very good action, especially during the winter fishery. The panfish grow very quickly when stocked into the marsh.

Musky action at Big Elkhart and Random lakes has been very good at times over the past five years. Random Lake has been best in the early season while Elkhart action has been relatively steady. Elkhart Lake is a very clear lake during most years and the night bite can be the best there. The fish sometimes suspend over deep water, probably feeding on cisco and other "open water" species.

Washington County

DNR's fish survey of Big Cedar Lake in 2005 indicated that the northern pike population of the lake is beginning to rebound after a prolonged period of decline. A 40-inch minimum size limit was enacted several years ago for northern pike on the lake in an effort to rehabilitate that population. We found more yearling pike in the lake in 2005 than had been observed in the recent past and anglers are beginning to comment on how many more small pike that they are catching. Anglers in 2005 also commented on catching more and bigger largemouth bass and were also catching some limits of nice bluegills and perch. The adult walleye population

was somewhat down due probably to poor success from stocking but, recent stocking may have been more successful as a fair number of small walleye were observed

Pike Lake continues to be the best walleye lake in Washington County due entirely to natural reproduction. An electrofishing trip in fall 2004 confirmed that the adult population of walleye remains in good shape. However, few small walleye were captured during that survey. Perch, bluegill and largemouth bass action has been very good at the lake at times.

Smallmouth bass fishing has reportedly been very good on the Milwaukee River in West Bend and downstream in recent years. It is not unusual for anglers to catch 30 or more smallmouth bass in an evening.

Fond du Lac County

Long Lake near Dundee is one of the best overall lake fisheries in the general area. A comprehensive fish survey of the lake in 2004 confirmed that the lake holds the best largemouth bass population of any lake in the area. A high percentage of the bass were of legal size or larger. The panfish fishery of Long Lake fluctuates considerably due to very heavy fishing pressure, especially in winter. Northern pike were abundant in the lake according to the survey but most were below the 26-inch minimum size limit. - *John Nelson, senior fisheries biologist, Plymouth*

Walworth County

Lauderdale Lakes and Lake Beulah

DNR conducted baseline fish surveys on several Walworth County lakes in 2005 and found that both the Lauderdale chain of lakes and Lake Beulah support large numbers of bass. Most bass in these lakes are less than 14 inches long but 18-plus inch fish do swim these waters. In cooperation with the Lauderdale Lakes Improvement Association, we have stocked 51,424 smallmouth bass fingerlings into the Lauderdale chain between 2001 and 2005. Some of these smallmouth are showing up in fall surveys and growth rates are very good with some approaching the legal size limit of 14 inches. Anglers looking for lots of bass action will be heading to Lake Beulah and the Lauderdale chain in 2006.

Delavan Lake

Still greatly benefiting from the 1990 lake restoration project, 2,500 acre Delavan Lake continues to support excellent largemouth bass and smallmouth bass populations. The minimum size limit of 18 inches has created above-average size structure. Our walleye stocking program, along with special fishing regulations, has created an excellent walleye fishery. Many walleyes collected in our surveys are over the minimum size limit of 18 inches. Northern pike reproduce naturally in this lake and survival and growth are excellent. The minimum size limit is 32 inches and the daily bag limit is one. Bluegills dominate the panfish community and size structure is above average. Our fish survey crews see many 'gills 7 to 8 inches long and some even larger. We stock about 2,500 muskellunge into Delavan Lake annually. Fish survey crews have collected musky up to 48 inches long. We plan on stocking two strains of musky in 2006 as part of a study to compare survival and growth between muskies originating from Wisconsin and stocks from elsewhere. Anglers spending time on Delavan Lake in 2006 should have a quality fishing experience. While fishing Delavan in 2006, you may be interviewed by a DNR employee asking to see your catch along with questions about your fishing trip. If so, chances are pretty good that you are talking to our creel clerk. Please cooperate with this employee. Your information will allow us to estimate important aspects of the Delavan fishery like number of angling trips, success rate, and total fish harvest.

Turtle Lake

Turtle Lake supports a healthy largemouth bass population. Our fish surveys turned up bass up to 18 inches long. Bluegills are abundant with some up to 8 inches long. The Turtle Lake Sportsmen's Club has stocked walleye fingerlings into this lake and fish surveys have collected walleyes up to 18 inches long.

Geneva Lake

A perennial favorite, 5,000 acre Geneva Lake supports excellent largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike, and walleye populations. Geneva gets stocked with walleyes every other year, and lake trout and brown trout annually. Game fish in this lake feed on abundant mimic shiners and growth rates are excellent. There is a 32 inch minimum size limit and 1 daily bag limit on northern pike. Black crappie grow big here, and yellow perch numbers are up. Geneva Lake offers one of the highest quality fishing experiences around.

Racine County

Anglers heading for Browns Lake in 2006 will enjoy some great action on largemouth bass. A fall 2005 fish survey collected bass at the excellent rate of 86 per hour. Most bass were between 13 and 15 inches long with a few greater than 16 inches. Browns received 103,920 walleye fingerlings between 2002 and 2005. Some of these fish have showed up in fall electrofishing surveys. Growth rates are excellent and several walleyes between 16 and 18 inches long were collected. Browns Lake is a good bet for anglers wanting to have a lot of action catching northern pike. Northerns were caught at the rate of 20 per hour during fall 2005 electrofishing. Lengths ranged between 17 and 32 inches. Nearby forty-acre Rockland Lake is a good choice for largemouth bass. The shoreline on this carry-in lake is undeveloped and provides an aesthetically pleasing fishing experience. The 12-16 inch slot size limit means anglers can harvest bass under 12 inches and over 16 inches. Tichigan and Wind lakes are both stocked with walleyes in alternate years. Free DNR launch ramps are located on both lakes. Smallmouth bass anglers should do well on the Fox River between Rochester and Burlington.

Kenosha County

Special fishing regulations and an extensive stocking program on Silver Lake will attract anglers again in 2006. 23,000 walleyes are stocked every other year and 1,000 muskellunge are stocked annually. Fish surveys have sampled muskies up to 47 inches long. The 18 inch minimum size limit and 1 daily bag limit on largemouth bass gives anglers a chance to catch quality size fish. WDNR fish surveys on the Fox River in 2005 collected smallmouth bass, white bass, yellow bass, and channel catfish. - *Doug Welch, senior fisheries biologist, Sturtevant*